DSG Part 1: What's Going On?

I didn't realize I was in the sandwich. It was weird, because it started slowly.

This is what I heard:
"My kids won't send me pictures of the grandkids any more. They say I need email. What is that and can you help me?"

"My kids won't email me any more, they say I need to get on Facebook. What is that?"

And so the sandwich making started.

I was just starting my jobs at my local libraries - yes, jobs, plural, and libraries, plural. Part time, I could earn enough money to pay rent and keep my car going. My mother told me I should be a librarian, but being young and stupid, I resisted. I'd had enough of school.

But I enjoyed libraries - public libraries, especially. If you're going to make a career out of it, why not get the degree, too? I already had a degree in Information Systems, so what was another year and a half?

Oh, Ugh!! No.

So, I stubbornly went about my days working. It was pleasant enough, but I noticed that there were not enough people in the library itself that really knew and understood computers. The Internet was here to stay (this was 2002-03) and our libraries provided needed access. People came in all the time to use it, and I even noticed librarians searching Amazon to match book descriptions that patrons would give. They used it because it gave better results than the library database….

At any rate, I continued to watch and work. I used computers and the Internet, of course, and seemed to have a knack for both. I'm not a programmer, but I can understand some of it, and certainly talk to the computer and software engineers. I can also talk to computer users, as I was pretty accustomed to the frustrations of using them.

I helped patrons and staff with computer issues big and small: why is this working slowly; how do I fix my margins; can I get my email password; how do I copy this and paste it here; my mouse isn't working well; why doesn't the printer work; wait, now the printer won't stop how do I make it stop, I'mwastingpaperhelp…. The usual things.

I liked helping people make these "new" tools work well. Computers have been in common usage since the late 1970's, early 1980's, but usually they were in business offices, complete with genuine IT departments that would clear up these issues. In the 1990's, the computer really "came home," and it was widely adopted by many. At the same time, the Internet was on the rise, and in just a very short decade, both the computer and Internet would become dominant. Stay with me here, as I'm only up to about 2004-2005.

If I was to make a career of the public libraries I loved so much, I'd have to get my librarian degree. My mother was right. So, after a 12-year detour working as a nurse, then getting a degree in Information Systems, I finally went back to get my Master's degree.

I was on my way.

Going to school and balancing 2 part-time jobs at 3 different libraries was painful. It wasn't until I found out about a training program at the local library that I saw a glimmer of hope. The program was a great way to get your name out there with the supervisors, and a great route to getting an interview for a position after finishing school. Fantastic! I sent my resume, got an interview, sent my thank you notes, and waited.

And waited… and waited.

I only found out I had been passed over when I heard another student talking about her job as a trainee. I was devastated; I went to my car and cried.

After pulling myself together and working another week, I got curious. I called the human resource department and got an interesting answer: hang on. With my IT background, they wanted me for the data center. If I was willing to wait, they would get me in for an interview.

Whoa!

Yes, I was willing to wait and would be happy for an interview. In the meantime, I was working as a computer tutor at one of the three libraries. I started by volunteering information to my boss, saying I'd be happy to tutor people as long as my other duties were done. She was happy to have me do it, and soon I developed a regular group of students.

The library paid me at my regular hourly rate, and didn't charge the patrons, of course. This was just a new service we started offering, and if it worked, so much the better.

Several months passed, my tutoring sessions grew, and word of mouth got me more students. Soon I was tutoring at two of the three libraries. I guess it worked very well!

When I got the job offer in the data center, I would be giving up the tutoring. My students were happy for me, and encouraged me to keep teaching. According to them, I was good at it. Very good at it.

With those recommendations ringing in my ears, I took off for my first data center job. As I learned new information, I put all thoughts of tutoring on a shelf. I liked this job, and I got to help people on the phone, so it was working out well, for the most part. I was content for about a year, dividing my time between full-time schooling and part time work. I met my husband and his children, and after marriage, I moved to our current home. Life was busy and good.

Since I had earned my library degree, I kept my eyes peeled for a job outside of the data center. However, during that time, something else caught my eye. The mobile training lab.

Now, the lab was made up of laptop computers, a wireless Internet connection, and the electrical cables that came with. That was it. If a library wanted to teach patrons how to use computers, they could request the laptops. This was a bit of a chore, but they got around quite a lot. As a worker in the data center, I took them out and set them up for classes. I would assist patrons in the class, but the librarians would set the agenda of the workshop and do all the teaching. I discovered my love of tutoring again.

I could do this.

I could create these classes and teach. We could offer this service to our libraries: full-service digital literacy classes.